

TRENDS IN NON-SUPERPOWER USE OF INSURGENCY
AS AN INSTRUMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY

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insurgency: a revolt against civil authority or an established government by a rebel not recognized as legitimate

Historical. The principle that my-enemy's-enemy-is-my-friend has a long if not always honorable usage by all sorts and conditions of legitimate governments: what better friend than one operating in the foe's heartland? Geoffrey Blainey in his The Causes of War found that in relatively big wars between 1815 and 1939 twenty-six out of thirty-one had previous internal disturbances with an outside link. Since 1939, counting aside, it might be said that the use of insurgents for policy aims has all but become a conventional option even of very small states. America, long before superpower status, was often both the arena for such manipulation (the French Indians or later the British Indians) and the instigator of similar ploys (our Cubans and for a time our Philipinos). Thus proxy war using insurgents who may be proclaimed or denied, depending on various considerations, has long been a tactic or even a strategy both for defensive or offensive motives.

Spectrums of Analysis. For present purposes a somewhat more detailed description of existing practice is possible.

(1) Intensity Spectrum. There is a long arc of intensity in matters of insurgency beginning with a violent few gathered together with the intention of seeking recourse from perceived ills through violence to the assembled forces

in a civil war anticipating international recognition. In Spain in 1936, the Germans intervened at first with a few transport planes to aid General Francisco Franco in moving his Foreign Legion troops from Morocco to the Spanish mainland and then escalated aid and comfort to an expeditionary force and ultimately ended as a civil war with a large international component - the most significant war between the wars. Presently the world is cluttered with groups of the violent; many tiny but virulent. In small Ireland alone there are a half dozen secret armies and elsewhere small islands of rebels with a few pistols and a dream. Sometimes, as in the case of the Armenians, the dream is of the past rather than the future. There are remarkably few such groups absolutely without legitimate friends of some sort. Perhaps no state aided the South Moluccans, but no Palestinian splinter seems too small to find a patron. Yet, even those Armenians have at times operated with the tolerance of their hosts. Thus the degree of violence or the potential for escalation hardly dissuades patrons. What appears attractive to most patrons is the capacity to fuel violence at small cost in order to inflict harm. And the intensity of that violence is often in the eye of the beholder - or the threatened. Thus television terrorists kill few, but outrage many and hence often gobble disproportionate defensive assets. Still in crude, non-quantitative terms the more insurgents, the more costly the patronage; but escalated costs may be a matter of bookkeeping: very used weapons or very soft currency or very unwelcome advice even in large quantities may buy violence at bargain rates. The most important aspect of the intensity spectrum is how

intensely the targets feel the pressure: how expensive is target-Salvador under Nicaragua-Cuba-Russia threat, contrasted to unconventional disorder in a conventional banana republic? Thus a little intervention may go a long way - it can also be the first drop in a bottomless rat hole. And also a little intervention may be perceived by the target as a great threat requiring retaliation (a few in-bound rockets and suddenly the Israelis are shelling Beirut). In sum, the intensity spectrum (violence level) alone indicates very little; for the strategists must parse the return on the investment and the perceptions of the victim.

(2) Control Spectrum. Intervention in insurgencies runs across an arc of control that begins with using your own barely deniable assets to vague offers of ideological comfort. Every step away from absolute control may permit greater deniability but at escalating costs, since rare indeed is the insurgent with the same criteria or even timetable as the patron. In fact, conventional wisdom to the contrary, most insurgents have an abiding suspicion of their friends - the devil they know all too well. What is good for Egypt in Aden may not be good for the National Liberation Front even if Nasser is the font of Arab nationalism and their quartermaster (and the NLF did in time break with Egypt). A problem for the patron is that fully-owned-and-operated rebels compete poorly in the market place of violence with freer, if poorer, alternative organizations. At least most patrons would like to seek exclusivity; in Africa in the sixties the Chinese found that the Soviets had snapped up the biggest and best national liberation movements leaving Peking the others -

some of which turned out to be successful sleepers. To a degree if the patron simply wants to cause trouble then the degree of control is less important (the idea of Libya dictating to the IRA Army Council boggles the imagination). This has to be particularly true when control is not only distant and partial but also exercised, if at all, through intermediary organizations or states or both. Thus the Russians are friends of the Syrians but Syrian control of the Palestinian-manned Sa'iqua is more than once removed from Moscow and some (if not many) of Sa'iqua contacts with other non-Palestinian groups may not be directed by Damascus. Some Palestinian groups (most) have many patrons with little control. In fact, most rebels want, in the following order, delivered arms, money, recognition - and no interference in any of these! Thus a patron always faces a control problem in that the more direction given the less advantages of a viable proxy can be recouped; conversely, the more freedom given the less dictated advantage can be assured. Hence for precise surgical operations owned-and-operated rebels seem most appropriate while for general ideological and mega-strategical aims allies as insurgents appear the best bet. Alack, most potential patrons find their interests generally lie in the grey middle ground of the spectrum of control.

(3) Intent Spectrum. It is, in fact, a separate arc of analysis, interrelating to control and intensity, that might be called the Intent Spectrum; the goals of surrogate warfare waged by allied insurgents. China supports the odious Khmer Rouge to restrict Vietnam ambitions and thus punish the Russians. As long as there are sufficient new anti-Vietnamese recruits -- and no shift in

Peking priorities -- this policy can be pursued at little real cost (mainly in the realm of international respectability -- the lack of which in turn has certain perceptive advantages). Conditions on the ground -- and beyond Chinese control -- assure an appropriate level of intensity (China's friends cannot win and at worst would take a long time to lose). China for the moment needs no special control since the rebels, while engaged in the theory of long war, by necessity pursue a strategy congenial to Peking's interests. Thus China's intent can be carried out by giving aid to an enemy's enemy and thus punishing an enemy's friend. There is no concern, at the moment, that the Cambodian rebels will (or can) escalate hostilities in intensity or location, withdraw from battle, or (at this stage how could they?) embarrass their patron. They have become a cost-effective instrument of Chinese foreign policy (even if they were to win -- always a nasty possibility with supposedly purchased rebels -- so would the Chinese).

Tactics and Strategy. For the most part, historically and presently, states have used insurgents as a tactical maneuver to weaken opponents and strengthen themselves, often at little cost. Such interventions, depending on who reads what evidence, would appear to play a part, at times a significant part, in assuring more conventional violence (war) at a later date. Plausible denial of patronage is rarely very plausible and unconventional violence is often a harbinger of conventional war. Yet, again, the decision for rebel patronage in most cases is narrowly tactical, but rather resides in a mega-strategy.

tegic context. Thus it really makes limited sense to discuss Non-Superpower Use of such tactics. To a real degree rebels everywhere who receive aid and comfort from any Western power or Western ally are part of a mega-strategy to make the world safe for democracy (if not capitalism). The same is true -- in reverse of course -- for national liberation movements underwritten by the Russians or their proxies. When Italian communists fought Italian fascists in Spain (who was legitimate and who was a rebel was a lethal matter), both did so in the name of international ideologies that, like communism and democracy, today seem to have an interest in every sparrow that falls. In retrospect, it is clear to many that the Spanish civil war was largely about Spanish matters, that it was only incidentally a battleground of international ideologies, and that those who interfered had less effect on the military outcome than had been thought. Thus today, proxy revolt in the broadest sense is an aspect of the clash of global ideologies engaged in a zero-sum game. Mostly, however, non-superpower patrons seek tactical gain. The strategic concept of One, Two, Three Vietnams did not work in the bush because there was only one Vietnam. Thus rebels who fail to hoe their own violent garden, but rather have planted strategic exotic vines have harvested woe. Tactical gains may be very narrow - and, most important, are thus available for the very poor. The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen can underwrite the rebels of Oman to the delight of their fellow militant Arab nationalists and, ultimately, their own Russian patron. Anyone can play patron and gain some tactical advantage, even if only a sense of importance, which

may offer a strategic sparrow to the distant patron. Thus such intervention may have removed if major ramifications in future wars, and may be seen as altering, however slightly, the strategic balance, but usually non-superpowers become involved for tactical gain.

And the world presently is filled with rebels bearing chits from legitimate states: surrogate warriors for some patron seeking inexpensive tactical advantage.

The Future.

Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future.

- Niels Bohr

- (1) Since the superpower contest will continue, there will be ample ideological reason for patrons of insurgency.
- (2) More importantly, such patronage seems to offer the prospect of tactical advantage at minimum cost, especially immediate cost. Thus most insurgents will continue to find patrons.
- (3) Insurgency, made somewhat easier and more lethal, will continue (except, perhaps, in democratic states which lack a nationality problem and inefficient, brutal, authoritarian states).
- (4) And hence all the problems of analysis and response focused on middle

